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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the reading preferences of senior level special education majors, noting which professional journals students chose most frequently for article summaries completed for a senior level curriculum and methods course. The summaries were collected over the course of 19 semesters, from fall 1973, through spring 1982. One hundred and fifty-one articles from journals in special education were analyzed. Data from the article summaries were analyzed using the descriptive statistics of means, percentages and rank orders. Results showed that of the sixteen journals that students selected, "Exceptional Children," "Journal of Learning Disabilities," and the "Journal of Special Education" were by far the most popular. Findings also appeared to support previous research regarding teacher reading habits. In general, teachers read journals which accompany membership in professional organizations. Likewise, two-thirds of the journals most frequently chosen by students were sponsored by professional organizations. In addition, the clarity of readership patterns reflected in this study appear to support previous findings that teachers tend to read the same journals. (A table of data and nine references are included.) (ARH)

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Special Education Journal Reading Patterns of Senior Level Undergraduate Education Students at the University of Oklahoma, 1973-82

Bonita Davis and Charles E. Butler

Introduction

Previous research has indicated that teachers do little professional reading (Cogan and Douglass, 1977). Factors such as non-availability of professional journals in school and school district libraries, lack of encouragement by school and school district administrators and perceptions of irrelevancy of professional journal content on the part of teachers appear to be positively related to this low readership (Drost and Kersten, 1980). George and Roy (1979) found that the opportunity of teachers to discuss journal readings in faculty meetings was significantly positively related to the time teachers spent reading such professional journals. Stopper (1982) suggested that professional journal reading may be negatively affected by the inability of teachers to efficiently choose and comprehend journal articles because of the time demands of teaching. Mour (1977) indicated that teacher education faculty were responsible because of their failure to incorporate professional reading in their courses, their own reading habits and their research and publication patterns.

Petre (1977) found that teachers tended to read the same journals. Drost and Kerston (1980) found positive correlations between amount of journal reading and level taught, degree level, and teaching experience (age). The latter two factors, degree level and teaching experience, were also found to be positively related by George and Roy (1979), and Cogan and Douglass (1977), and Balow (1961) confirmed the teaching experience - readership relationship.

The research evidence is also very clear that teachers prefer and tend to read, if they read at all, professional journals that are non-theoretical and practical (Drost and Kerston, 1980; Hughes and Johnston, 1978; Eicher and Wood, 1977; and Cogan and Anderson, 1977). Balow (1961) and Hughes and Johnston-Doyle (1978) indicated that

teachers were not subscribers to professional journals, but read those journals that were provided with membership in a sponsoring professional organization.

It seems clear however, that the following journals are among those most read by teachers, generally: Today's Education, Instructor, Teacher and Learning (Mour, 1977; Cogan and Anderson, 1977; Drost and Kerston, 1980; Balow, 1961; Hughes and Johnston, 1978 and Eicher and Wood, 1977).

An exhaustive review of the literature revealed a relative paucity of research focused on secondary school teachers' professional journal reading patterns, as compared to those of elementary teachers. Drost and Kerston (1980) reported that high school teachers read more professional journal articles than either junior high or elementary teachers and that the majority of the articles read by secondary teachers were subject-matter specific (specialized). This author could not locate a single study which focused on high school teachers exclusively or which attempted to determine professional journal reading patterns within a subject-matter specific or specialized field.

The ex post hoc descriptive study reported in this paper seeks primarily to expand the knowledge base concerning the professional journal reading patterns of secondary school teachers in Special Education professional journals. Secondarily, it attempts to generate data which might be useful in increasing teacher readership of professional journal articles.

Background of the Study

One hundred and fifty-one articles from journals in special education were analyzed in this study. The articles were summarized on 5x7 cards and submitted to the instructor of a senior curriculum and methods course in partial fulfillment of course requirements. The cards were reported during 19 semesters, from Fall, 1973 through Spring, 1982. The students had been instructed to submit two articles

bi-weekly, one from a general journal, described as "one which was published for teachers/educators, generally," and the other from a specialized journal, described as "one which was published for their own specialized certification field."

The choice of journal content was discretionary with the students, though occasionally they were directed to focus their readings to coincide with specific class content and activities. Students were urged to explore a wide range of journals, but were not given the names of any specific journal or any other biasing information other than the section of the library in which the journals were generally located. Students were given a specific reporting format and were limited to articles that were less than five years old.

The submitted readings were subjected to random examination by the instructor to ascertain: a) the relative accuracy of the summaries, b) whether format requirements were met and c) that the generalized/specialized reporting dichotomy was maintained. Students received random verbal feedback concerning the general quality of the cards and selected cards were reported verbally to the class.

Data Analysis

This author and a colleague examined the submitted articles as "general" or "specialized," using data available from the Research Office of the College of Education, and the university journal index as guides. Both researchers had to agree on the "general" or "specialized" categorization of an article; otherwise the article was categorized as "other." The number of articles classified as "other" was negligible. Subsequently, those articles categorized as "specialized" were categorized according to certification areas, i.e., Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Speech, etc. This paper is concerned with the certification area, Special Education.

Data for the 151 special education readings were analyzed using the common descriptive statistics of means, percentages and rank-orders. Tests of significance

were not performed because they were deemed not to be germane to the purposes of this researcher and to be of limited importance to the readers.

Table A provides a succinct summary of the statistical treatment of the data. Column I of the table indicates the number and percentage of times the journal was ranked in the top five, based on reported frequencies. Exceptional Children was ranked in the top five 14 times, or 74% of the 19 reporting periods. Column II reflects the number and percentages of times the journal was ranked 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th or 5th. It can be seen that the Journal of Learning Disabilities was ranked 1st twice; 2nd, three times; 3rd, once; 4th, twice and 5th, none. The respective percentages of the 19 reporting times were 25, 38, 13, 25 and 0. Column III indicates the number and percentage of total special education articles represented by each journal. As revealed in the table, articles from Exceptional Children totalled 69 or 46% of all the special education articles for the study period. Column IV is a less powerful index of the reading report pattern. It was derived by averaging the rankings of each of the journals, in terms of frequency, across the 19 reporting periods. While this statistic is less precise, it does permit an examination of the long-term frequency performance of the various journals. It tends to favorably reflect those journals which ranked consistently high across the reporting periods. Exceptional Children attained a mean ranking of .95, which was below the mean rankings for the Journal of Learning Disabilities and the Journal of Special Education, which had a mean rankings of 1.06 and 1.18, respectively. It should be emphasized that the only journals listed in Table A were those that were represented in the top five at any time during the 19 reporting periods. Only four articles came from the two journals that were reported, but are not listed in Table A.

Findings

The data appear to suggest the overwhelming popularity of Exceptional Children, the Journal of Learning Disabilities and the Journal of Special Education. They also suggest that students read or were exposed to a wide range of journals in special education -- a total of 16 such journals were represented by the readings.

General research findings that teachers tended not to subscribe to professional journals they read, but, rather, read those which accompanied membership in sponsoring professional organizations were confirmed. The data in this study indicated that nine of the fourteen, or two-thirds of the journals ranked in the top five were sponsored by professional organizations. However, two of the three apparently most read journals, the Journal of Learning Disabilities and the Journal of Special Education, are not sponsored by professional organizations.

The clarity of readership patterns reflected in this study appear to support Petre's (1977) finding that teachers tend to read the same journals.

The special education journal articles were not analyzed according to the research/non-research dichotomy. However, the dichotomy for all articles reported indicated that 3,948, 91%, of the 4342 articles were non-research articles. Assuming this proportion is reflected within the specialized journals, it can be argued with merit that prospective teachers prefer to read non-research articles, confirming the findings of several researchers previously mentioned (Balow, 1961; Hughes and Johnston-Doyle, 1978). In none of the nineteen reporting periods did the percentage of non-research articles exceed 27%.

Discussion

The findings of the study appear to support findings of previous research regarding teacher reading habits. This study extended past research from patterns, in general, to patterns within the specialized journal area of special education. The

preliminary indications are that readership patterns within the special education area do not vary considerably from those within education, generally.

There is some question as to whether or not patterns within specialized education, generally, and special education, in particular, are similar to general patterns with respect to the tendency to read articles which are research, as opposed to non-research, in content. The fact that journal publication policies related to the issue of research orientation vary suggests a primary concern to be considered in future research.

It was not the intent of this author to account for variations in readership patterns among the various journals. However, careful examinations of copies of the various journals indicate that circulation, format, sponsoring professional organizations, attractiveness, ready accessibility, organizational membership, and target audience account, in large part, for these variations. Additional research should focus on such variables. Publishers interested in increasing their share of the special education-reader market might well profit from such research. Such research may also profitably be done by college and university professors in their preservice and inservice education courses.

Finally, this author recommends that professors and instructors at the college and university levels incorporate professional journal reading in their courses, thus responding to Mour's (1977) suggestion that teacher education faculty members are chiefly responsible for lack of professional reading on the part of public school teachers in the United States.

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Table A
Data Summary Table

Journal	I. # and (%) of times ranked in the top five		II. # and (%) of times ranked or tied for (place):					III. # and (%) of all Special Education Journal articles	IV. Mean rankings for all reporting periods
	#	%	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th		
*Exceptional Children	14	(74)	13(93)	0(0)	1(7)	0(0)	0(0)	69(46%)	.95
Journal of Learning Disabilities	8	(42)	2(25)	3(38)	1(13)	2(25)	0(0)	21(19%)	1.06
Journal of Special Education	8	(42)	0(0)	3(38)	4(50)	0(0)	1(7)	16(11%)	1.18
*Journal of Speech and Hearing Disorders	2	(11)	1(50)	0(0)	0(0)	1(50)	0(0)	4(2%)	.26
*Education and Training of the Mentally Retarded	3	(16)	1(33)	0(0)	2(66)	0(0)	0(0)	8(5%)	.39
*Hearing and Speech News	1	(5)	0(0)	0(0)	1(100)	0(0)	0(0)	1(1%)	.18
*The Gifted Child Quarterly	3	(16)	1(33)	1(33)	1(33)	0(0)	0(0)	6(4%)	.47
Journal of Speech and Hearing Research	2	(11)	0(0)	0(0)	1(50)	1(50)	0(0)	3(2%)	.37
*Teaching Exceptional Children	3	(16)	0(0)	2(66)	1(33)	0(0)	0(0)	8(6%)	.42
*Behavioral Disorders	1	(5)	0(0)	1(100)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	3(2%)	.11
*American Journal of Mental Deficiencies	2	(11)	0(0)	0(0)	1(50)	1(50)	0(0)	4(2%)	.39
*Learning Disability Quarterly	1	(5)	0(0)	1(100)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	2(1%)	.13
Academic Therapy	1	(5)	0(0)	0(0)	1(100)	0(0)	0(0)	1(1%)	.18
Perceptual and Motor Skills	1	(5)	0(0)	0(0)	1(100)	0(0)	0(0)	1(1%)	.18

*sponsored by professional organization